

## **The After, Stories by Hopping Mad - Chrissy**

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**Summary:** Some one-shots based around the end of Season Two.

# 1. The End

Authors Note: A few one-shots between the time Eleven closes the gate, and the Snow Ball.

Story One: The End.

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"Joyce, come in, Joyce. Over." He stood outside Hawkin's Lab, Eleven sitting on the front steps, head hanging in exhaustion, blood still dripping from her nose and ears. He could only imagine how she felt, considering how every inch of his body ached.

"I'm here Hopper, over." The sound of her voice, and seeing El next to him... it made his heart sing. Could this hell really be over? Could Joyce finally have Will back?

"Will we see you at the cabin? Over."

"Yes, we are here. The kids are coming too. Is El okay? Over."

"She is fine. We will see you soon. Over."

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The drive from Hawkin's Lab back to his cabin was a blur. At some point El had fallen asleep, finally unable to fight her exhaustion. On arriving he carried El's body through the front door, held open by Joyce and straight to her bed. Mike followed him in and once she was tucked safely under her duvet he sat at her feet. Mike's hand lay over her legs in a possessive, protective manner.

"Will she be okay Chief?"

"Yeah, she'll be fine kid." He ruffled the boys hair. "You can stay here tonight if you like."

"I think we all need to," Mike answered softly and gestured to the door where the rest of the gang was hovering.

"I'll get you blankets."

Joyce embraced him the moment he walked through the girls bedroom door, she held so tight he felt as though she wasn't planning on ever letting go.

"Is it over, Hop?" She loosened her hold a little and looked up at him, her face tear streaked, hair still sweaty and clinging to her face. He gently brushed a strand hanging over her eyes and gave her a reassuring smile.

"I hope so, I really do." He glanced over her head towards where Will lay on a make-shift bed. "Shall we pop him in the bedroom with El? He would be more comfortable."

Hopper picked up the small boys limp body in his arms, Will seemed only vaguely aware of what was going on. He gently lay him under the duvet beside El, the rest of the children were sitting or laying around the bed and his heart suddenly felt full. Eleven was like a daughter to him, but each and every one of the kids in the room meant so much to him. It made him happy to see, and feel the love that they all shared. The bond between these kids could never be broken, particularly after everything they had been through.

Joyce was handing out blankets while he rearranged the lounge to fit Joyce, Nancy, Jonathan and himself. Steve was about to say his goodbyes, ready to go home and recover. His face looked as though he had been pummeled, but Hopper would have to worry about that tomorrow. Tonight, all he wanted to do was sleep with all the people he cared about most in his life under the same roof.

Nancy and Jonathan took one couch, Nancy small enough that she could lay in Jonathan's arms. Joyce left the kids door open and came out giving both Jonathan and Nancy a gentle kiss on the forehead.

"I'm so lucky to have a son like you Jonathan," she whispered. While she spoke with Jonathan he took one more look into Eleven's room to ensure she and her friends were okay before heading back to the lounge.

"You can take my bed," he told Joyce, gesturing to his bed. "I'll sleep

on the floor." Joyce frowned, her mouth twisting slightly as if she were going to say no. He could see her hands trembling at her sides and for one moment he forgot that Jonathan and Nancy were in the room, and that all the children were within earshot. "Joyce," he took the few steps across the room to reach her and pulled her to him, kissing her gently on the top of the head. "Just take the bed, you need it more than me."

"Not true," she mumbled against his chest. He released her and gently tugged on her hand, leading her to the bed. It wasn't quite a single, but it certainly wasn't a large bed. He pulled back the covers and she turned to face him, glancing worriedly behind her. "Lay with me," she whispered. "Please." He also looked behind him, but none of the kids were looking in their direction, they seemed to be studiously ignoring them. Or perhaps they were simply too tired to care.

"Okay." Under any other circumstances he would never have agreed. He cared deeply for the woman before him, but there was so much more to it. Tonight they had almost died, they had almost lost Will - again. He felt that this could be called a good enough reason, or reasons, to hold her in his arms.

He tugged off his boots and overcoat before climbing into bed beside her. She was so small she took up hardly any room and before he could wonder how he should lie, she had all but thrown herself on top of him, tucking herself tightly against his body. He thanked the heavens that he was so exhausted his body couldn't betray him.

"Sleep well," he whispered, and again kissed her on the top of the head. "I think it's finally all over."

**The End.**

## 2. Bob

Authors Note: A few one-shots between the time Eleven closes the gate, and the Snow Ball.

Story Two: Bob

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*One week after El closed the gate.*

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Joyce left Jonathan in charge of Will and with shaking hands turned down the driveway to Hopper's cabin. She planned on sneaking Eleven back to her house so that Jonathan could care for her too, and then she would meet Hopper at the station. She and Hopper would be driving two towns over to shop for El, because there was no way anyone who knew about Eleven could go shopping for feminine clothes in a small town without being questioned, not for a thirteen year old girl's clothes anyway.

She did the secret knock and waited for Eleven to open all the locks, the girl didn't take long and the moment she opened the door she threw herself into Joyce's arms.

"Hello to you too." She chuckled. "So I'll get you to lay down in the backseat with a blanket over you. But while we drive I want you to tell me of all the things you want for your bedroom, and what kind of clothes you want. Okay?"

"Yes, okay." El responded, an excited grin spreading across her face. "Pretty things!"

"Of course, pretty things for a pretty girl. That sounds right to me." Joyce ushered her to the car with a grin. She was excited to be able to help Hopper make this girl's life all that it should have been. She had secretly always wanted a daughter, not that it made her love her sons any less - but Hopper allowing her to help with El meant she could buy all those girly things she had always wanted to buy.

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Joyce couldn't contain her excitement and though she allowed Hopper to drive, she spent the whole time fidgeting in the passenger seat.

"Jesus, would you stop already?" Hopper sounded gruff, but she could see the smile he was trying to hide. "You really want to do this, huh?"

"Of course I do!" She exclaimed with a small laugh. "It's about time that girl got to live a relatively normal life."

They fell silent for a while before Hopper broke it with a sigh. She looked over at him curiously, one eyebrow raised.

"I just... wondered how you were doing, at home? I've not been able to visit since El, I know there would have been a big clean-up to do. I'm sorry I didn't help."

"Oh, between Jonathan, Nancy and the kids we got things in order." She shrugged. "We will be okay."

"I know you will, you're tough." She huffed at this.

"Oh yes, Crazy Joyce - the quivering mouse is tough." She rolled her eyes. "Whatever you say, Hopper." He looked over at her in surprise.

"You don't think you are strong?"

"I guess not," she sighed softly. "I'm neurotic, the crazy mama bear who just won't let her boys two steps from her."

"No-one blames you." He told her sternly. "Anyone in your position would be over-protective of their son."

"No-one knows the real story. I hear the things they say about me Hopper, I have no illusions. It's been happening since Lonnie, I'll never fit into this town fully."

"Well, I think that they are wrong. You are right, they don't know the whole story. They also don't know the real you."

"It's funny," she mused. "Bob loved me, he felt as though he had hit the jackpot dating me. He once told me how much it meant to him that I had chosen him, when at school I was just so much cooler than him." She chuckled, using air quotation marks for the word *cooler*. "It's as if he were blinded, because to be honest, I'm not the Joyce I used to be." Her heart ached thinking of Bob, poor Bob. He had been so good for her family, and in the end he had been a hero.

"I'm sorry about Bob," he reached over and placed a hand over hers, his large hand covering her trembling hand completely. "I know that..." he trailed off, unable to say the next words. She guessed he knew as well as she did that she had never been *in love* with Bob Newby. She had loved him, she had *wanted* to be *in love* with him - but when it came down to it... she felt her eyes filling with tears and she pulled away from Hopper, angry he had started such a conversation when she had been feeling so buoyant moments before. "Shit, Joyce." She felt the car pull over and the tears began to fall in earnest, she felt a sob rise to her throat. "Shit," he repeated. "I'm sorry, I should have just kept my mouth shut."

"It's okay," she mumbled. "It's me who should be sorry."

"C'mere." He reached over an arm and tucked her against him, her body leaning awkwardly over the gear stick. "You have nothing to be sorry for."

"I wasn't in love with him," she hiccuped, and turned her face against his chest.

"But you loved him, and you loved the stability he gave your family." She sobbed quietly into his chest. It was so *wrong* of her to use him in that way.

"I used him," she wasn't even sure he could make out her words anymore due to the crying, but she felt she had to explain herself, so she took a deep breath. "I wanted to be in love with him so badly. I wanted someone to lean on, someone to love my boys and give us a stable family environment." She took another breath, trying hard to reign in her tears. "I wanted to be wanted, needed by someone."

"Oh Joyce, you didn't do anything wrong. You were dating him, not

married to him." He chuckled and looked down into her eyes. "You and Bob had an amazing few months together, you made each other very happy. Right?"

"Yes," she mumbled.

"And you miss him?" She felt her heart throb.

"More than anything."

"Then there is nothing wrong with the way you are feeling."

She cried then, really cried and sobbed and made an absolute mess of Hopper's shirt. She wasn't exactly sure how, but Hopper had helped relieve some of the burden she carried around. She called it the Bob Burden in her mind. Hopper had made her feel like she could one day accept the death of Bob, and maybe even carry on without that guilt hanging over her head.

"Let's go find El some *pretty* things, let's go have a day off from Hawkin's and all the memories we have there." He told her when she had finally stopped crying and shifted back to her own seat, taking shaky breaths to calm herself.

"Let's do that."

"One thing I forgot to mention," he turned the key in the ignition. "I need you to find a dress for her for the Snow Ball." He turned and she felt herself smiling.

"Are you for real? You're letting her go to the Snow Ball?"

"I am indeed."

"Oh Hopper," she lifted a hand to her heart. She couldn't find the words to explain how happy she was for both El and Mike that they could go to the Snow Ball together. She also selfishly couldn't wait to go shopping for the perfect dress, she returned to her earlier thoughts on how much she had wanted a daughter to shop for, and some of her earlier excitement returned. Maybe things would work out after all.



**The End.**

### 3. Snow Ball

Authors Note: A few one-shots between the time Eleven closes the gate, and the Snow Ball.

Story Three: Moments.

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*Snow Ball*

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Joyce leaned against her car and closed her eyes, trying to picture what might be happening inside. Was Will okay? Would he find a girl to dance with? He could be so shy and awkward, she hoped that he wouldn't be teased. It was about time her son had some normality in his life.

She heard footsteps approaching and without looking she knew it was Hopper. She couldn't explain it, she just always knew when he was around. There was something about his presence that just immediately made her feel safe.

"Hey," he said.

"Hey," she responded softly, pleased to see the smile on his face. She hoped all she had told him about preparing El for the Snow Ball had helped.

"I thought I might find you out here," it touched her that he had specifically come looking for her. It didn't surprise her that he if all people knew she wouldn't be able to be far from Will yet.

"Will wanted me to give him some space, so... I'm giving him a few feet." She chuckled. Hopper held up his filterless camels and tapped the box invitingly, and she was thrown back into past memories of sharing the damn things with him in school. She had smoked on and off her whole life, but camels always made her think of Hopper, and despite hating the filterless cigarettes that burned her throat - it brought back good memories.

"What do you say?" He asked. "I'm pretty sure that Mr. Cooper retired in the '70s, so..." she looked up, remembering the times they had run from Mr. Cooper, or been put in detention together. "We might be okay." He finished, lighting up his cigarette. Yeah, some bloody good memories.

"Gimme me that," she took the cigarette from his hand. Maybe she felt safe around him because they had known each other for so long, he was her rock, someone completely familiar and unthreatening. She and Hopper had certainly had their arguments, hell they had broken up too many times to count throughout school - until finally he just up and left Hawkin's. But she had more happy memories with the man beside her than sad. Plus Hopper had now saved her son, so she would always have a very special place in her heart for him. She took a drag, coughing as the smoke hit the back of her throat. Hell, she would never get used to them.

"How are you holding up?" He asked.

"You know." Her fingers automatically coming to her mouth. She had never been able to quit biting her nails. The doctor said it was due to her anxiety. Something called 'self soothing'. She was pleased Hopper never mentioned her anxious tics, or her mental state. He was one of very few.

"Yeah, that feeling never goes away. It is true what they say you know, every day does get a little easier." he answered, and though many people had pretended to understand what she had been through in the past two years, and to lament her loss of Bob... Hopper was the only person she knew *really* got it. He was the only one who knew *everything* that had happened, plus he was Jim Hopper. At one point of her life, he had known her inside and out. She looked up at him, and without a word his arm came up, ready for her. How many times had he tucked her against his body? Protected her against the ugly world outside? She let out a breath she didn't know she had been holding, and moved in closer, letting his arms hold her tight against his chest. She needed this more than she could ever tell him in words. Just needed a moment of safety and peace.

**The End.**